COUNTRY PERSONALITY: THE APPLICATION OF BRAND PERSONALITY CONCEPT TO COUNTRY AS A BRAND

Kullanun Sripongpun , Khon Kaen University, Thailand
Kawpong Polyorat , Khon Kaen University, Thailand

ABSTRACT

Brand personality refers to human personality traits associated with a brand. Through a series of studies, Aaker (1997) uncovers five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful), excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date), competence (reliable, intelligent and successful), sophistication (upper class and charming) and ruggedness (outdoorsy and tough). Although brand personality has attracted interest from marketing researchers for several decades, relatively little work has been conducted to examine how the brand personality construct can be applicable when a country is used as a brand. To fill this gap, a survey research was conducted with Thai consumers to examine how Aaker's five dimensions are replicated and applicable for a country as a brand. The study results from factor analysis reveal that most of the personality items load on the intended dimensions when used as a country. Therefore, it appears that the five brand personality dimensions as uncovered by Aaker (1997) are fairly robust in measuring country personality, although some discrepancies remain. Our findings suggest avenues for future research to refine and develop a scale to specifically measure country personality.

Keywords: Country Personality, Country Personality Scale, Brand Personality Dimensions

Introduction

Brand personality is one component of a brand that has attracted interests from marketing researchers for several decades (Rojas-Mendez, Erenchun-Podlech & Silva-Olave, 2004). Brand personality research is conducted in many areas; for example, there are studies of brand personality dimensions from the perspective of consumers in different countries including Japan (Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera, 2001), Spain (Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera, 2001), Korea (Sung and Tinkham, 2005) and Belgium (Geuens, Weijters & Wulf, 2009). There are also numerous studies that examine variables that influence the brand personality dimensions, such as product type (Ang & Lim, 2006; Polyorat, 2011). In addition, a number of studies deal with the validation of existing brand personality scales such as the study of the validity of Aaker's brand personality scales by Mishra (2011) or the study of new measurement scale to be used in different settings, such as the store personality scale (d'Astous & Levesque, 2003).

Although researchers have revealed an increased interest in brand personality in numerous aspects, the research that examines how the brand personality construct can be applicable when a country is used as a brand is still in its infancy. Therefore, the current study, Thai consumers were conducted by a survey research to examine how country as a brand is replicated and applicable by the Aaker's five dimensions. Specifically, we attempt to examine country personality or the adaptation of the brand personality concept to measure consumer's perceptions of the country. We believe that our study in the application of Aaker's five dimensions of brand personality to measure country personality is one step toward filling the void in brand personality literature.

Theoretical background

Brand personality

Brand personality refers to the group of human traits or attributes that can be used to describe a brand (Aaker, 1997). Brand personality can be formed by two factors: product-related factors, such as the product category itself, packaging, price or physical attributes. The other factor is the one not related to the product itself, such as consumers' past experiences, consumer imagery, symbols, marketing communication, word of mouth, CEO image, celebrity endorsers and culture. (Sung & Tinkham, 2005)

Brand personality often reflects a more self-expressive or symbolic function than a utilitarian function (Keller, 1993). Brand personality can affect consumer preferences and choices. (Swaminathan, Stilley & Ahluwalia, 2009). Moreover, it offers an opportunity to create a good relationship between consumer and brand. (Swaminathan, Stilley & Ahluwalia, 2009) If brand personality is noticeable and unique, it will enable the brand to live longer in the market and help consumers easily recognize the brand (Mishra, 2011).

Aaker (1997) developed a brand personality scale based on the theory from psychology and marketing. Her factor-analytic study finally uncovered 42 personality traits grouped in five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity (down-to-earth,

honest, wholesome and cheerful), excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date), competence (reliable, intelligent and successful), sophistication (upper class and charming) and ruggedness (outdoorsy and tough).

These five dimensions were found to be robust across the several sub- samples: male sub-sample, female sub-sample, younger sub-sample, and older sub-sample. Moreover, the scales of these five dimensions are suggested to possess generalizability because they emerge from different sets of brands and different sets of product categories (Polyorat & Tuntabundit, 2007). Although there are some criticisms, Aaker's brand personality dimensions are used by numerous researchers (e.g., Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Milas & Mlacic, 2007; Romero, 2012) who have studied brand personality.

Country personality

The brand personality construct has received interest from many researchers. Numerous studies attempt to develop an instrument to measure brand personality. Nevertheless, most of these studies focused on brand personality with traditional products. More recently, researchers of contemporary marketing attempt to adapt the brand personality concept to study non-products such as place or country (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri & Kurtulus, 2010). The idea of a country as a brand is playing a more important role in people's lives through mass media, product and brand origin and travel experiences. D'Astous and Boujbel (2007) argued that country personality is a useful instrument for assessing the country image by using the human traits as a guideline. This consumer's perception is very important for global marketers where multinational transactions occur more frequently.

Among the first researchers in country personality, d'Astous and Boujbel (2007) attempted to develop a scale based on human traits to measure country personality in relation to country image in order to position the country. The process of developing their scale leads to the construction of psychometrically sound measuring instruments. A sample of French-speaking Canadian adults was individually interviewed about the adjectives they would use to identify the country personality. After that, these adjectives were included with another group of adjectives that were generated from previous personality scales. Then, the length of the adjective list was reduced and later categorized by an underlying personality factor structure. The result revealed six country personality dimensions: agreeableness, wickedness, snobbism, assiduousness, conformity and unobtrusiveness, which was generated from 37 adjectives. Furthermore, the scales were refined from 37 adjectives to 24 adjectives by another group of French-speaking Canadian adults. The 24 adjectives were tested for their stability, psychometric properties and adequacy in the reduced scale. Both full (37 items) and reduced (24 items) scales demonstrated a stable structure and satisfactory psychometric properties. In sum, the country personality scale from this study appears to be used to position countries. Moreover, it can measure the attitude of the country, the attitude of the product from that country and also the attitude toward countries as travel destinations.

D'Astous & Li (2009) examined how Chinese people perceived the personality of the following 11 countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and the United States. This study applied the 37

items of country personality scale from d'Astous & Boujbel (2007) with some adaptations for the Chinese context. A survey was conducted with a sample of 184 adult Chinese people from Beijing. The result from factor analysis revealed 6 factors: agreeableness, wickedness, unobtrusiveness, assiduousness, conformity and snobbism. The details of the results are as follow;

Agreeableness: Chinese respondents perceived their own country was the highest in this personality trait while Australia, Brazil Canada and France also obtained high scores. On the other hand, Japan obtained the lowest score when compared with others.

Wickedness: The countries with the highest score were the United States and Japan. Interestingly, China did not obtain the lowest score in this personality trait when compared with Canada and Australia.

Assiduousness: China received the highest score, followed by Japan. Their mean scores were, however, not significantly different. This result was surprising because the Chinese apparently have strong negative feelings against Japan, which, was expected to affect their decision making with regards to this personality dimension.

Snobbism: The country obtaining the highest score of this personality trait was the United States. Next were Japan and France, respectively, while China had the lowest score.

Conformity: Saudi Arabia was the country with the highest score on this personality dimension whereas the country with the lowest score was China.

Unobtrusiveness: This personality trait received the lowest of mean scores when compared with other personality traits. The only statistically significant differences were observed between Saudi Arabia and Russia, and also between Saudi Arabia and United States. Saudi Arabia received the highest score, the next was Russia with United States having the lowest score.

This study also revealed that Chinese people's general attitude towards a foreign country was mainly explained by their perception of two factors; agreeableness and wickedness. The most important personality dimension in the product-country attitude model was assiduousness while the personality dimension "agreeableness" was significant for the travel destination model. Moreover, the adapted scale has good psychometric properties and displayed a consistent result similar to those in previous research. Also, it is a possibility that the reason that Chinese people had strong negative feelings towards Japan is from the atrocities of Japan in the Second World War. Klein, Ettenson and Morris (1998) demonstrated that this situation did not affect the evaluation of products which were made in Japan but it may have impacted Chinese people's country personality perceptions. Furthermore, the reason that Chinese people rated their own country with high scores on positive personality traits and low scores on negative personality traits is based on their home-country bias. This result is similar to those found in country of origin literature (eg., Elliott & Cameron, 1994; Ahmed & d'Astous, 2004; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Hsieh, 2004;

d'Astous et al., 2008) where people are found to prefer their own country's products more than those from other countries.

Regarding place personality, Kaplan et al. (2010) studied brand personality of places and examined how it can be applicable when a city is used as a brand. In general, literature approaches the city personality from the perspective of destination and tourism marketing. In this study, however, the researchers focus on "place" branding. This study investigates personality dimensions of the three most populated cities in Turkey: Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. A survey was conducted among 898 participants. The result from factor analysis revealed 6 factors from 87 personal traits: excitement, malignancy, peacefulness, competence, conservatism and ruggedness. This study showed two new factors of brand personality for cities that have not been found in any research before: malignancy and conservatism. The previous research of brand personality such as Aaker (1997)'s study did not present the malignancy dimension and the conservatism dimension because two dimensions, namely openness and neuroticism from the Big Five model were removed and only positive personal traits were used in her study. In reality, the characteristics of a brand can be presented in negative aspects, as can be found in human characteristics (Kaplan et al., 2010). As a result from eliminating these two dimensions, the study of Aaker (1997) was not completely congruent with the Big Five model. Her results do not show the dimension of malignancy and conservatism probably because these two dimensions are the reflections of neuroticism. Additionally, the finding of Kaplan et al. (2010) demonstrated that the lack of such negative dimensions may affect the accuracy of the measuring instruments.

From the above discussion, it would be fruitful to examine how Aaker's brand personality dimensions can be applicable in studying country personality. Country personality is a relatively new construct and starts to attract interests from marketing researchers. Little work that specifically examines how the brand personality construct can be applicable when a country is used as a brand, however, exists. Therefore, to fill this gap, the current study will examine how the Aaker's five dimensions are replicated and applicable for a country. Based on the foregoing discussion, our research question states:

RQ: How can the five dimensions of brand personality construct be applicable when a country is used as a brand?

Methodology

Because the primary purpose of this study is to examine how the Aaker's five dimensions are replicated and applicable for a country, we adopt the imposed-etic approach where a research instrument is imported in its original form and then translated into the local language.

Brand personality of a country is measured with Aaker's (1997) 42-item Brand Personality Scale. The original scale in English is translated into Thai using a back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). Participants were instructed to think of a country (Laos) as if it were a person and to rate on a five-point scale (1 = not at all descriptive, 5 = extremely descriptive) the extent to which each of the 42 brand

personality traits describes the country. There are no reverse-items. The assessment considers the brand as a whole, rather than the people in that country.

Three hundred and fifty-five Thai undergraduate students participated in this study. The age of participants varied from 18 to 29 years with the mean value of 20.10 years. Male participants accounted for 33% of the sample. Subjects were first informed of the study description, then asked to complete the Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale for the country personality of Laos and provide personal data including age and gender.

Result

The 42 brand personality traits were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis with a varimax rotation and a 5-factor solution imposed a priori. Items which had low loadings (<.40) or cross-loaded on two dimensions (over .30) were removed (Nunnally, 1978). The factor loadings, eigenvalues and percentage of variance explained are displayed in table 1.

Thirty-nine out of 42 Aaker's items loaded properly on the intended factors. The results showed five factors when the researchers applied brand personality construct in the context that the country is used as a brand. Factor 1 represents Aaker's original excitement dimension. Factor 2 represents the sincerity dimension. Factor 3 represents the competence dimension. Factor 4 represents the ruggedness dimension while Factor 5 represents the sophistication dimension. Three of Aaker's items did not properly load on the intended factors. The three items "unique", "independent" and "contemporary" from the Aaker's excitement dimension loaded on the other dimensions instead. "Unique" loaded on sincerity dimension whereas "independent" and "contemporary" loaded on competence dimension. In addition, the "wholesome" item has cross-loadings on both the sincerity dimension and the excitement one. The primary loading on the sincerity dimension, however, is as intended. At the same time, the "charming" item also has cross-loadings, it was found on both the sophistication dimension and the competence one. However, sophistication dimension is more proper and similar to the intended factor.

Discussions

Summary

Overall, our study revealed five country personality dimensions similar to Aaker (1997)'s five brand personality dimensions (competence, sincerity, sophistication, excitement, and ruggedness). Most of the personality items loaded on the intended dimensions. Therefore, it appears that the five brand personality dimensions as uncovered by Aaker (1997) are fairly robust and applicable in measuring the country personality although some discrepancies remain.

Nevertheless, the brand personality structures in our study are not completely identical to those of Aaker (1997). Three unexpected items which do not represent of the excitement dimension as in Aaker (1997) are unique, independent and contemporary. The first one is perceived as representatives of sincerity whereas the next two items are perceived as representatives of competence. It could be that in

measuring the country personality, these three personality traits conveyed different meanings from those in the brand personality of traditional products. Moreover, some characteristics and the meaning of the items in excitement, sincerity and competence dimensions may be closely related and can share their common characteristics together.

Theoretical Implications

This study provides both theoretical and managerial contributions to the areas of branding and tourism marketing. In terms of theoretical implications, because research that specifically examines the country personality is still scant, our study is an initial study that examines the country personality construct by focusing on the application of 42 personality traits from Aaker (1997) to evaluate the extent to which these 5 dimensions can be used in the country context. Kaplan et al. (2010) suggested that the personality traits which Aaker (1997) created in her study did not contain the adjectives with negative dimensions: therefore, it may affect the measuring instruments and impact the result of the study as well. However, the result in our study demonstrates that Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale is, to a certain extent, also applicable for a country when it is considered as a brand. Although some items shows small difference from the pattern of factor loadings in the original study, five brand personality dimensions can be used to measuring the country personality. This point thus represent an opportunity of the researchers to extend Aaker (1997)'s brand personality scale to different contexts.

Another noteworthy findings from our study is concerned with the ruggedness dimension. Rojas-Mandez et al. (2004) and Davies et al. (2001) suggests that the ruggedness dimension was neither reliable nor valid. However, the result of current study, as well as that from Polyorat, Khantuwan, Jaratmetakul and Boonnon (2008), demonstrates that all dimensions including "ruggedness" are nicely replicated and reliable. This discrepancy may suggest avenues for future research to study the conditions under which the ruggedness dimension will be psychometrically sound.

Managerial Implications

In today's world, people have known about countries through various channels. Consumers' perception of a country is very important for global marketers as they have to compete with rivals from other countries. Country personality scale presents psychological dimensions that people use to mentally represent countries (d'Astous & Li, 2009). Findings of the current study revealed the consumer's perception of the country (Laos). This can be helped to position the country with the proper direction, that is, not only to conserve the positive dimension of country personality but also improve some dimensions that have low score. In this context, country personality may be involved to determine the strategies for the tourism as well. Tourism organizations will use this data to adjust the tourism strategies for attracting the tourists. In addition, country personality can be used as an instrument to define the appropriate product position strategy and to influence the perception of both product and service from a given country. Because now, people pay attention to the country of origin more than the past and many researches revealed the country of origin has a significant impact on consumer product evaluations (Nagashima, 1970; Chao, 1993; Ahmed & d'Astous, 2004; Pharr, 2006).

Study Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

The current study has a number of limitations. For example, the results of this study are conducted in one country. The replications in different countries are desirable. Furthermore, this study collected data from student samples only; our results may not be able to represent the findings from all the populations. In sum, our findings suggest avenues in future research to conduct additional studies by using more representative samples. Additionally, it would be important to refine and develop a scale to specifically measure country personality.

Acknowledgement

References

Aaker, J.L. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality. **Journal of Marketing Research,**
34(3), 347-356.

Aaker, J.L., Benet-Martinez, V. & Garolera J. (2001). Consumption symbols as carriers of
culture: a study of Japanese and Spanish brand personality constructs**. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81**(3), 492-508.

Ahmed, S.A. & d'Astous, A. (2004). Perceptions of countries as producers of consumer
goods a T-shirt study in China. **Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management, 8**(2), 187-200.

Ang, S.H. & Lim, E.A.C. (2006). The influence of metaphors and product type on brand
personality perceptions and attitudes. **Journal of Advertising, 35**(2), 39-53.

Azoulay, A. & Kapferer, J. (2003). Do brand personality scales really measure brand personality? **Brand Management, 11**(2), 143-155.

Balabanis, G. & Diamantopoulos, A. (2004). Domestic country bias, country-of-origin effects, and consumer ethnocentrism: a multidimensional unfolding approach. **Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 32**(1), 80-95.

Brislin, R.W. (1980). Translation and content analysis of oral and written material. In Triandis, H.C. & Berry, J.W (Eds.). **Handbook of Cross-cultural Psychology**. (pp. 389-444). Boston: Ally & Bacon.

Chao, P. (1993). Partitioning country of origin effects: consumer evaluations of a hybrid
product. **Journal of International Business Studies, 24**(2), 291-306.

d'Astous, A. & Boujbel, L. (2007). Positioning countries on personality dimensions: scale
development and implications for country marketing. **Journal of Business Research, 60**(3), 231-239.

d'Astous, A. & Levesque, M. (2003). A scale for measuring store personality. **Psychology and Marketing, 20**(5), 455-469.

d'Astous, A. & Li, D. (2009). Perceptions of countries based on personality traits: a study
in China. **Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, 21**(4), 475-488.

d'Astous, A., Voss, Z.G., Colbert, F., Caru, A., Caldwell, M. & Courvoisier, F. (2008).
Product country images in the arts: a multi-country study. **International Marketing Review, 25**(4), 379-403.

Davies, G., Chun, R., Da Silva, R.V. & Roper, S. (2001). The personification metaphor as a measurement approach for corporate reputation. **Corporate Reputation Review, 4**(2), 113-127.

Elliott, G.R. & Cameron, R. (1994). Consumer perception of product quality and the country-of-origin effect. **Joumai of Intemational Marketing, 2**(2), 49-62.

Geuens M., Weijters B. & Wulf K.D. (2009). A new measure of brand personality. **International Journal of Research in Marketing, 26**, 97-107.

Hsieh, M. (2004). An investigation of country-of-origin effect using correspondence analysis: a cross-national context. **International Journal of Market Research, 46**(3), 267-295.

Kaplan, M.D., Yurt, O., Guneri, B. & Kurtulus, K. (2010). Branding places: applying brand personality concept to cities. **European Journal of Marketing, 44**(9/10), 1286-1304.

Keller, K.L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. **Journal of Marketing, 57**, 1-22.

Klein, J.G., Ettenson, R. & Morris, M.D. (1998). The animosity model of foreign product
purchase: an empirical test in the people's Republic of China. **Journal of Marketing, 62**(1), 89-100.

Milas, G. & Mlacic, B. (2007). Brand personality and human personality: findings from
ratings of familiar Croatian brands. **Journal of Business Research, 60**, 620-626.

Mishra, A.S. (2011). Validity of Jennifer Aaker's brand personality scale in India. **Romanian
Journal of Marketing, 6**(2), 17-24.

Nagashima, A. (1970). Comparison of Japanese and U.S. attitudes toward foreign products.
Journal of Marketing, 34, 68-74.

Nunnally, J.C. (1978). **Psychometric Theory**. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Pharr, J.M. (2006). Synthesizing country-of-origin research from the last decade: is the
concept still salient in the era of global brands? **Journal of Marketing Practice and Theory, 13**(4), 34-45.

Polyorat, K. (2011). The influence of brand personality dimensions on brand identification
and word-of-mouth: the case study of a university brand in Thailand. **Asian Journal of Business Research, 1**(1), 46-61.

Polyorat, K., Khantuwan, W., Jaratmetakul, P. & Boonnon, N. (2008). Dimensions of brand personality in Thailand: some empirical evidence. In Taylor, Charles R., Schmitt, Bernd, S., Wagner, U. & Jia, J. (Eds.). **Proceedings of Global Marketing Conference**.   (pp. 1-13). Korean Academy of Marketing Science.

Polyorat, K. & Tuntabundit, V. (2007). Brand personality structure : Thai consumers' perceptions. **Proceedings for Global Business and Technology Association Ninth international Conference, Taiwan**. (pp. 598-605). The Global Business and Technology Association.

Rojas-Mendez, J.I., Erenchun-Podlech, I. & Silva-Olave, E. (2004). The Ford brand personality in Chile. **Corporate Reputation Review, 7** (3), 232-251.

Romero, M. (2012). An exploratory study on brand personality in Mexico. **Global Conference on Business and Finance Proceedings, 7**(1), 286-292.

Sung, Y. & Tinkham, S.F. (2005). Brand personality structures in the United States and
Korea: common and culture-specific factors. **Journal of Consumer Psychology, 15**(4), 334–350**.**

Swaminathan, V., Stilley K.M. & Ahluwalia, R. (2009). When brand personality matters:
the moderating role of attachment styles. **Journal of Consumer Research, 35**, 985-1002.

Table 1
Factor Loading of Aggregate Data

	Items	Varimax-rotated principal Factors				
		Factor 1 Excitement	Factor 2 Sincerity	Factor 3 Competence	Factor 4 Ruggedness	Factor 5 Sophistication
1	down-to-earth		.569			
2	family-oriented		.630			
3	small-town		.700			
4	honest		.527			
5	sincere		.595			
6	real		.580			
7	wholesome	.405	.469			
8	original		.741			
9	cheerful		.554			

10	sentimental		.561			
11	friendly		.629			
12	daring	.637				
13	trendy	.811				
14	exciting	.617				
15	spirited	.544				
16	cool	.661				
17	young	.727				
18	imaginative	.638				
19	*unique*		.592			
20	up-to-date	.666				
21	*independent*			.432		
22	*contemporary*			.469		
23	reliable			.644		
24	hardworking			.655		
25	secure			.604		
26	intelligent			.573		
27	technical			.532		
28	corporate			.557		
29	successful			.535		
30	leader			.479		
31	confident			.568		
32	upper class					.454
33	glamorous					.640
34	good looking					.688
35	charming			.438		.466
36	feminine					.463
37	smooth					.576
38	outdoorsy				.567	
39	masculine				.678	
40	western				.741	
41	tough				.764	
42	rugged				.743	
	Eigenvalues	9.81	4.32	2.70	2.23	1.45
	% of variance explained	23.36	10.29	6.44	5.31	3.45

- In Aaker's (1997), items#1-11 = Sincerity, items#12-22 = Excitement, items#23-31=Competence, items#32-37 = Sophistication and items#38-42 = Ruggedness.
- Italics= items not loaded on the intended factors.